

THOMAS TASCHINGER: Mermaid show was new low for TV, us

By Thomas Taschinger

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It's hard to decide who to be more angry at: Animal Planet, for broadcasting a silly hoax about mermaids last Sunday night, or the countless people who were duped by it.

Stop laughing; this is serious. Our culture has just hit a new low, even though we seem to dig deeper every month or two. If we can't handle mermaids (or unicorns or leprechauns, etc.) how are we going to fend off the Chinese in the battle for dominance of the 21st century?

In case you missed all the nonsense, one of the most respected brands in wildlife/outdoor television decided to act like a bunch of high school sophomores with a new camera and some nifty production software.

The result was "Mermaids: The New Evidence," a three-hour "mockumentary" about the ladies of the sea and the "scientists" who study them. Oh, there was some fine print in the closing credits about the show being science fiction, not science, but who reads that stuff?

Worse yet, if it can get worse, is that this hoax followed an earlier hoax by Animal Planet - "Mermaids: The Body Found" (ya gotta love those titles). In other words, if you were somehow fooled by this tale last year - which was also widely panned - how could you be duped again?

Apparently, lots of viewers were - 3.6 million, the most ever for any Animal Planet Show. The. Most. Ever.

Some of them were just playing along, of course. But a distressing number thought, well, mermaids were legit. Check out some of these angry Tweets gathered by Newsmax:

-- M.RAZZ @kinzierazz

spent 3 hours last night watching all the mermaid stuff and come to find out this morning on the news its all a hoax. (Expletive deleted.)

-- HumanBot @JennyDivine

Screw you Animal Planet for making me watch that stupid Mermaid documentary & it was all a hoax.

-- The Daily Teen @365DaysOfTeen

I'm (angry), I just saw on the news that the mermaid show was all a hoax and the guy that said he was a scientist was just an actor.

Wow. I don't know about you, but my faith in our future just dropped a notch or two.

But really, should I/we be surprised? Large numbers of people think a giant undiscovered ape roams North America, often because they have been watching "Finding Bigfoot" on (you guessed it) Animal Planet.

I confess to tuning in from time to time - without going all-in. One of my favorite episodes included a chap who swears he saw a giant silver/gray Bigfoot in a fairly populated rural area. One of the "Squatchers" solemnly explained that since hair turns gray or white in older humans and gorillas, it probably does for Bigfoot too ... so that "witness" saw a senior citizen Sasquatch! Riigghht.

People have always believed in some kind of tomfoolery, but we happen to be living in the most technologically advanced society on earth with the greatest percentage of college graduates. You would think that by now, our knowledge of real science would be a tad ahead of our fascination with, say, astrology.

I don't know what the answer is, but networks like Animal Planet can help by focusing on fact, not fiction, if they truly want to save the many endangered animals and habitats out there. Without those creatures and wild places, Animal Planet doesn't have anything to broadcast.

At least that will prevent some gullible people from wasting their time, though it probably won't stop the hard-core ignorant like @M_Watts25 who Tweeted,

"So I'm pretty sure that government didn't want people to know about mermaids so they covered it up by calling it a 'hoax' on the news."

Sigh. Maybe it is too bad the world didn't end last December like the Mayans said it would.